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## CURRENT AMERICAN LITERATURE.

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TRANSLATIONS\* from the French have given place to paraphrases from the Russian, the Flemish, and even the Icelandic. We are promised a posthumous work from the Flemish of Hendrik Conscience, the novels of Tolstoi, Dostoyevsky, and Gogol are first among the literary fashions, and now we have the Icelandic idyl, "Sigrid." "Sigrid" is a simple, pastoral story, having the directness of truth, without, however, the color and imaginative glow which makes Boyesen's "Gunnar" a poem in prose. "Sigrid" is an Icelandic maiden, who remains true to her lover in spite of the wiles of those who would separate them. The farm life of the Icelanders, their economies, their almost brutal way of looking at the material side of existence, their isolated world,—which is like the great world seen through a microscope,—and the easy code of morality which obtains among the laborers and farm-servants, are described by Jan Thordsson Thoroddson without one superfluous word. Turning from Thoroddson to Gogol, the Russian novelist, whose "Taras Bulba" and "Dead Souls" are issued by the same publisher, we are struck by the similar characteristics in both, and in the crude and uncomplex natures they have to deal with. In essentials, the pastoral Iclander is very like the nomadic Cossack or the Russian of agricultural places. The latter is more fierce, more terrible, and more capable of fiery passion. But in "Taras Bulba," as in "Sigrid," the same view of women and matrimony obtains among the men who are incapable of or are untouched by love. In "Taras Bulba" the wife and mother is a mere chattel, powerless to make or mar her sons. In "Sigrid," Bard, the old farmer, tells his son, "Gudmund," that he will have to find "a bit of a woman" for him. "I have found out, Gudmund," he says, "since my wife died that wives are better than housekeepers; and it is very true that, in spite of the fact that my late wife was lavish, she never attempted to have the last word about everything as this devilish housekeeper does." Gudmund declares that there is nobody in the neighborhood whom he would like to marry, "because there is no one who owns anything." The state of society in Reykjavig, where the wholesale merchants ranked as aristocrats and servants attended balls given by the "best" people in the city, is delightfully depicted. "Crime and Punishment" may be fitly called a novel of horrors by that master of the horrible, Dostoyevsky. It is the recital of the effects of a murder on the mind of a man who commits it when in poverty and despair. He is a student, whose mother and sister are almost as poor as himself, but who help him out of their pittance. He kills an old woman for the sake of her savings, which turn, as it were, to dust in his hand. His gradual sink-down through various stages of remorse and delirium to despair is photographed in every phase by the most realistic of the Russian realistic school of novelists.

\* "Sigrid; an Icelandic Love Story." By Jan Thordsson Thoroddson. "Taras Bulba." By Nicholas V. Gogol. "Crime and Punishment." By Dostoyevsky. "The Death of Ivan Ilyitch." By Count Tolstoi. New York: Thomas Y. Crowell & Co.

Sonia, the heroine, has sold her honor and become a woman of the town,—“taken the yellow ticket,” as the urban Russian expresses it,—in order to help her step-mother and her children to live. She becomes the guardian angel of the murderer, though, while expressing the purest sentiments, she continues to follow her avocation as industriously as possible. With Sonia's drunken father, her erratic and consumptive stepmother, and any number of wretched and uncanny Russians, whose misery is without love or hope, Dostoyevsky manages to show powers of realism as effective as Zola's, but without Zola's grossness. The book is not a cheerful one, notwithstanding the promise of the author that the murderer and Sonia are to be shown, lovingly hand and hand, helping each other to better things in another novel. Another depressing but forceful novel is “The Death of Ivan Ilyitch,” by Count Tolstoi. It is the latest work of that celebrated religious enthusiast, and in it he has carried the grotesque to its uttermost point. As usual, it is pessimistic; but it has some of the pleasant touches that make his little story, “Katia,” so charming and true to life. Nevertheless, it is a *danse macabre*, headed by a skeleton. Tolstoi's personality actually possesses Ivan Ilyitch and dissects the qualities of that awful fear of death which comes to each man, at one time or another, forcing on him a sense of his helplessness. Ilyitch cannot see, feel, or hear what the terrible It is. It is death; he knows that; he is in its grasp; the whole world united cannot save him, and slowly but surely the relentless and unseen force loosens his hands from the hold they have on earth. The keenness and pitilessness of psychological analysis makes one shiver as if one had been present at a delicate bit of dissection done by a skillful surgeon. The dance of death begins in Ivan's household almost before his eyes, full of questions and remorseful fears, are closed. “Ivan Ilyitch” is the first novel Tolstoi has written in ten years. It was supposed that the peculiar ethics he had adopted were opposed to his further continuance in the art of novel-writing. The appearance of “The Death of Ivan Ilyitch” puts aside this supposition, and also the other, that his philosophical and theological meditations—culminating in the famous “My Religion”—had destroyed his interest in human life as a subject for artistic study. American readers may wonder why Russian novelists seem to bend all their energies towards increasing the gloomy tendency of the Russian nation under its present gloomy conditions. “Ivan Ilyitch” will increase that wonder.

Notwithstanding Dumas' recent philippic against Victor Hugo at the reception of M. Leconte de Lisle at the French Academy, the interest in the personality of this great but egotistical giant of French literature continues to increase in all civilized countries. We all admit, with Dumas, that the ego in Hugo was supreme; he was capable of writing, with Napoleon, “I am who I am,” and there was much that was meretricious in his nature and productions; but this rubbish has been, since his death, burned out in the red fire with which the Parisians have enthusiastically honored his manes. What is good in Hugo lives and will live. In\* “Things Seen” we have some rapid sketches, dated from 1838 to 1875, beginning with a wonderful portrait of Talleyrand and ending with Thiers and Rochefort. It would be strange, indeed, if the personality of a writer who came to earth with that strange miracle, the French Revolution, could ever lose its fascination. These sketches have the power of simplicity. Hugo attempts in them none of those vast and Doré-like effects which in his more important works became eventually a blemish. He draws Talleyrand in a few lines,—“He was of noble descent, like Machiavil, a priest like Gondi, unfrocked like Fouché, witty like Voltaire, and

\* Things Seen. By Victor Hugo. Harper & Bros.

lame like the devil. It might be averred that everything in him was lame like himself. The nobility which he had placed at the service of the Republic, the priesthood which he had dragged through the parade ground, then cast into the gutter, the marriage which he had broken off through a score of exposures and a voluntary separation—he received the confession of Mirabeau and the first confidence of Thiers.” In the Rue Saint Florentin, Hugo says, there are a palace and a sewer. Talleyrand lived in the palace, where he wove his webs that took in all Europe, but he never looked at the sewer. After his death, the doctors who made the autopsy left his brain on a table, and a servant, wondering what was to be done with it, remembered there was a sewer in the street; he went and threw the brain into the sewer. *Finis rerum!* The *fête* given by the Duc de Montpensier is described with the strength of Poe’s “Red Death.” It is in this sketch, as in several others, that one feels how plastic Hugo’s political principles were. He was Orleanist at this time, July 6, 1847, and there is no trace of the Republican of later days in him. Commenting on the indignation excited among the poorer Parisians by this luxurious ball, which gave employment to so many of them, he exclaims, with an insight as true as that which taught the Roman emperors that their subjects wanted games more than bread,—“No; they, too, want not the work, not the wages, but leisure, enjoyment, carriages, horses, lackeys, duchesses! It is not bread they require, but luxury.” There are some very grim touches in the “Funeral of Napoleon;” the note, for instance, concerning the ceremonial, while the remains of the emperor lay in state, “the lighting of the chapel costs the state three hundred and fifty francs a day. M. Duchatel, Minister of the Interior (who, it may be stated, by the way, is said to be a son of the emperor), groans aloud at this expense!”

Mr. Butler, who as tutor to the sons of the present Khedive, seems to have been well qualified for his tasks, has made a very readable book;\* from it one gets two impressions in regard to the author,—the first that he carries his “tub” with him and demands respect for it from the untubbed foreigner, the other that he has a firm belief in his own virtues and a high respect for them. He tells us little of real importance, but what he tells is well told. He hints at the immorality of the women of the harem and describes it fully in Latin notes. He gives the Egyptian harems a character worse than bagnios. And when he feels that he is verging on a revelation too piquant for the English language to express, he drops into silence abruptly and leaves the imagination to finish it. The Khedive, he says, is excessively good. He hates polygamy; he hates slavery; he “never even looks” at one of the large train of pretty slave girls who surround his wife, the princess. Mr. Butler hints that the Khedive told him some singular things concerning the practices of the harem; but, as an instructor of youth and a friend of the virtuous Khedive,—who, however, does not hesitate to accuse his father, the ex-Khedive, of shocking crimes,—he refuses to reveal them. Until Mr. Butler went to Egypt, a horse mounted by the sheik of the dervishes, was, on the birthday of the prophet, led over the bodies of prostrate dervishes, who were maimed or killed by the animal’s crushing hoofs. The Khedive kept in his tent during this horrible operation, but Mr. Butler described it to him, and, after several years of pleading and argument, succeeded in inducing him to stop it. The Khedive is fond of modern progress and would willingly extend the blessings of English civilization, though he is a stanch Mohammedan, throughout his dominions, were it possible. The character of the courtiers of the reigning Khedive is

\* “The Court of the Khedive.” By A. J. Butler. Charles Scribner’s Sons.

shown in a rather favorable light. They like polite and talkative people; they are easily pleased, densely ignorant, but anxious for knowledge provided it amuses them. The Egyptians of the upper classes despise women,—which is not surprising since young children are systematically corrupted in the harems,—they are sensual, perpetual bribe-takers, and incurably indolent. The Khedive appears to be the one Egyptian whom Mr. Butler regarded with respect. General Gordon was looked on by the Egyptians as a crank, and, although Mr. Butler would probably resent the assertion, the English, with their “fads” about the suppression of the slave-trade and the improvement of Egypt, are regarded in the same way. Mr. Butler says that the Khedive is sincere in his opposition to slavery; this is probable if Mr. Butler’s estimate of his character is correct. But he seems to be the only Egyptian whose idea of suppressing the slave-trade is not to call it by some other name pleasanter to English ears.

The motive of Mr. Henry Bernard Carpenter’s poem\* is love. Brother Aurelius is a monk who, in his serene cloister, tells a story full of poetic feeling, high aspiration, and passion purified by religion and suffering. Brother Aurelius was perhaps of that Port Royale order, which affiliated Madame Guyon and almost secured Fenelon. He cries, in an exquisitely poetic death scene,—

“The hour is coming—hear ye not her feet  
Falling in sweet sphere-thunder down the stairs  
Of Love’s warm sky ?—when this our holy church  
Shall melt away in ever widening walls,  
And be for all mankind, and its place  
A mightier church shall come, whose covenant word  
Shall be the deeds of love. Not *Credo* then—  
*Amo* shall be the password through its gates.  
Man shall not ask his brother any more  
‘Believest thou ?’ but ‘Lovest thou ?’ till all  
Shall answer at God’s altar, ‘Lord, I love.’  
For Hope may anchor, Faith may steer, but Love,  
Great Love alone is captain of the soul.”

Mr. Carpenter has a rare facility in the use of dactyls; but the songs interspersed through his graceful, lucid, and adaptable blank verse lack the highest lyric qualities of ease and suggestiveness. They express thoughts carefully, but never moods exquisitely. The “*Liber Amoris*” is a poem which may fairly be considered a hostage given by the author to the world for the performance of even greater things.

The visit of the Queen of the Hawaiian Islands to this country affords an opportunity for the publishers of this interesting book† to bring it again before the public. It was written in 1885, by C. M. Newell, an evident *persona grata* at the Hawaiian Court, and dedicated to Her Majesty Queen Kapiolani. Mr. Newell’s romance is valuable less in its assumed character than as a key to the condition of the Hawaiian people. The Hawaiian manners and customs, with the exception of the outward observances of the *tabu*, which fell, of course, with the power of the priests, have not changed so very much since the time of

\*“*Liber Amoris*.” Being the Book of Love of Brother Aurelius. By Henry Bernard Carpenter. Boston: Ticknor & Co.

† “*Kaméhamfha, the Conquering King*.” A Romance of Hawaii. C. M. Newell. G. P. Putnam’s Sons.

Kaméhamfha, the savage, with some touches of greatness, of whom Mr. Newell makes a hero. *Pele*, the terrible goddess of the volcano, no longer gets the sacrifice of a human being ; her goddessship is obliged to be contented with a roast pig. But we are told that all of the royal family, which is generally supposed to be entirely Christianized, are not above sacrificing publicly to *Pele*, whose fire and thunder reverberates from the volcano whenever a sacrifice is needed. Mr. Newell graphically disposes of the theory, still held by a few, that the famous Captain Cook was a martyr to Hawaiian treachery. He was, according to our author, a truculent and brutal person, who foolishly persisted in outraging the natives long after the patience of a less patient people would have been exhausted. Mr. Newell has a gift of picturesque writing, and his sympathy seems, whenever possible, to be with the Hawaiians, so much so that the goddess *Pele* takes the position of a veritable power. At times the Hawaiian Christian, reading this book, may, judging from Mr. Newell's fervor, almost fancy that he has become a convert to belief in "the goddess of the fiery mountain."

It was predicted that the author of "Mr. Isaacs," of "Dr. Claudius," of "A Roman Singer," of "An American Politician," was at once too prolific and too versatile. Nevertheless, he has continued to be prolific and versatile ; and, after reading his last novel, there are few who will prefix the "too" to those adjectives. "Saracinesca\*" is fresh, virile, and well-sustained. It has not only what the constant reader of novels demands, a new "flavor," but it has the ripe flavor of matured thought and the style of an experienced artist. Saracinesca is a Roman Prince, the son of an older Roman Prince. Two of the most subtle studies in the novel are characters of this old man and another, the old nobleman with whom Corona, the altogether womanly and noble heroine of "Saracinesca," has made a marriage of reason. She loves the younger Saracinesca ; he returns her love. He speaks finally, and then there follows one of the finest revelations of tenderness, honor, and dignity made in a modern novel. Corona remains faithful to her husband in will and act, though her thoughts have wandered. The death of her husband, after a fit of jealous rage, and because of the reaction produced by the certitude that she has been true to him, is a scene of dramatic force of so high an order that one can best appreciate it by understanding the artistic reticence of the writer of it.

"Saracinesca," by F. Marion Crawford. McMillan & Co.